

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BM
SUBJECT: BURMA'S NEW CABINET

REF: RANGOON 0773

SUMMARY: BURMA'S NEW CABINET CONTAINED NO MAJOR SURPRISES AND DOES NOT PORTEND ANY SIGNIFICANT POLICY CHANGES. HOWEVER, SOME OF THE NEW MINISTERS AND DEPUTIES SEEM TO BE BETTER QUALIFIED AND MORE COMPETENT THAN THEIR PREDECESSORS. CONSISTENT WITH THE RECENT TREND OF BRINGING MORE AND MORE MILITARY OFFICERS INTO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, ALL OF THE NEW MINISTERS ARE EITHER ACTIVE DUTY OR FORMER CAREER OFFICERS, LEAVING ONLY ONE OF THE PRESENT MINISTERS WHO HAS NEVER BEEN IN THE MILITARY. TWO OF THE NEW DEPUTY MINISTERS HAVE BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH OUR NARCOTICS CONTROL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. END SUMMARY

1. THE NEW BURMESE CABINET ANNOUNCED MARCH 3 CONTAINS 17 MINISTERS, OF WHICH NINE ARE HOLDOVERS; AND 19 DEPUTY MINISTERS, OF WHICH SIX ARE HOLDOVERS. THE MORE IMPORTANT FORMER MINISTERS TO RETAIN THEIR POSITIONS ARE PRIME MINISTER MAUNG MAUNG KHA, PLANNING AND FINANCE MINISTER U TUN TIN, DEFENCE MINISTER GENERAL KYAW HTIN, HOME AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER COL. SEIN LWIN, INDUSTRY 2 MINISTER COL. MAUNG CHO, AND EDUCATION MINISTER DR. KHIN MAUNG WIN. THE DEPUTY MINISTERS SIGNIFICANT
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TO US WHO WERE RETAINED INCLUDE DR. MAUNG SHEIN OF PLANNING AND FINANCE, THE GUB'S PRINCIPAL POLICY-LEVEL ECONOMIC EXPERT; AND U OHN KYI OF HOME AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, AN IMPORTANT FIGURE IN THE ANTI-NARCOTICS PROGRAM.

2. THE MOST DRAMATIC CHANGE IS PROBABLY IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHERE BRIG. GEN. MYINT MAUNG, A FORMER GUB AMBASSADOR TO THE

PRC AND TO THE U.N., WHO IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED CAPABLE AND DYNAMIC, REPLACED THE INEFFECTUAL U HLA PHONE (WHO WAS SHUNTED ASIDE TO THE COUNCIL OF PEOPLE'S JUSTICE). OTHER NEW MINISTERS OF SOME IMPORTANCE ARE CO-OPERATIVES MINISTER COL. SEIN TUN, THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF ARMOR AND ARTILLERY OF THE BURMA ARMY, WHO HAS IMPRESSED US AS BOTH CAPABLE AND UNUSUALLY CANDID; CONSTRUCTION MINISTER BRIG. GEN. HLA TUN, THE FORMER NORTHWEST COMMAND COMMANDER, WHO HAS BEEN A HIGHLY REGARDED MILITARY PROFESSIONAL; AND MINES MINISTER COL. THAN TIN, WHO WAS PROMOTED FROM DEPUTY MINES MINISTER AND IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE MORE POPULAR ARMY OFFICERS.

3. NEW DEPUTY MINISTERS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO US BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE NARCOTICS CONTROL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ARE COL. AUNG HTAY, DEPUTY MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND FOR CULTURE, AND COL. KO GYI, DEPUTY MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS. COL. AUNG HTAY WORKED CLOSELY

WITH US IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NARCOTICS PROGRAM WHILE HE WAS DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE SERVICES INTELLIGENCE IN 1974-76; AND COL. KO GYI, FORMERLY COLONEL, AIR STAFF, HAS BEEN INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN ALL MATTERS RELATED TO PROVISION OF AIRCRAFT. BOTH HAVE VISITED THE U.S. UNDER OUR SPONSORSHIP IN CONNECTION WITH THE NARCOTICS PROGRAM. THE NEW DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER, U TIN OHN, WAS FORMERLY HEAD OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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RANGOON UNIVERSITY HISTORY DEPARTMENT AND IS FAVORABLY KNOWN TO US THROUGH HIS PARTICIPATION IN USIS ACTIVITIES.

4. STATISTICALLY, THE RECENT TREND TOWARD BRINGING MORE AND MORE ACTIVE-DUTY OR FORMER CAREER MILITARY OFFICERS INTO POSITIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WAS CONFIRMED BY THE FACT THAT ALL EIGHT NEW MINISTERS ARE IN THIS CATEGORY. OF THE 17 PRESENT MINISTERS, ONLY ONE (EDUCATION MINISTER DR. KHIN MAUNG WIN), IS NOT A CURRENT OR RETIRED CAREER OFFICER. OF THE 13 NEW DEPUTY MINISTERS, HOWEVER, SIX HAVE NEVER BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE MILITARY. IN THE FORMER CABINET, ONLY TWO OF 16 DEPUTY MINISTERS WERE NOT ACTIVE-DUTY OR RETIRED CAREER OFFICERS.

5. COMMENT: THERE WERE NO PARTICULAR SURPRISES IN THE NEW CABINET LIST, NOR WERE THERE ANY CHANGES OF POLICY SIGNIFICANCE. IN ANY CASE, THE CABINET IS NOT AN IMPORTANT POLICY-MAKING BODY--ONLY PRESIDENT NE WIN MAKES IMPORTANT POLICY IN BURMA. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, THE NEW CABINET AS A WHOLE SEEMS TO BE AN IMPROVEMENT OVER ITS PREDECESSOR, WITH ITS NEW MEMBERS GENERALLY BETTER EDUCATED, BETTER QUALIFIED, AND MORE COMPETENT THAN THE PEOPLE THEY REPLACED. THE INITIAL REACTION OF KNOWLEDGEABLE BURMESE OBSERVERS HAS BEEN GUARDEDLY FAVORABLE.

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